

Prologue

Greetings to you Pedro! How are you today? It had been many years since we had a face-to-face encounter with each other. Do you remember it? It happened in Dulcinea Restaurant. The name of the restaurant was so apt to the main topic of our conversation that time: Is Dulcinea a sweet illusion for Don Quixote like a magical candy who fills the mind of one who ate it with sweet fantasies. As avid readers like Don Quixote, we know how books can put us into its sweet dream states but it can also wake us up and open doors to the depths of reality. Are books enclosing labyrinths of illusions or mind-opening doors to a greater reality? Ultimately, there is only one reality where we can truly meet others in loving face-to-face encounters in the world-soul. Was Don Quixote a prisoner of labyrinthine texts of medieval tales of chivalry or the books showed to him an open door to a deeper reality where Dulcinea really exists as a spring of sweet water in the depths of a cave?

I remembered our last conversation and this is why I am inviting you to join a conference about a recently discovered text, or much better for us who are literary critics, an 18th century novel. And guess what, it is a novel whose main character is named Dulcinea and it is connected with Miguel Cervantes' Don Quixote. It was found in a hidden cabinet in one of the walls of Palacio de Cuzco in the town of Vízcar. Had you visited that place? Of course, as a fan of the great poet Federico Garcia Lorca you probably know that place. But do you know that it has also a hidden treasure in the form of 18th murals depicting scenes from the novel Don Quixote that were painted on one wall of the palace. The palace is also known as Palace of Archbishop Moscoso.

Pedro, do you still remember our high school days when we formed a book club? It was the 5 of us: me, you, René, Jose, and Reynaldo who started it. We used to discuss and debate about authors and their works on the rooftop of my house like mad Don Quixotes with wild gesticulations as if the roof is a stage. Because of that, the people of our town thought us as strange and even crazy kids whom they tolerated because we are harmless unlike Don Quixote. Do you remember one time, when we were on rooftop, a large white V formed in the blue sky and we took a picture under it with the V downwardly pointing to the book you are holding in your raised right hand: Don Quixote. I really regret losing that picture, for you know, during that time cellphones are rare, so the picture is not digital but "physical." I lost it while I

was living in a college's dorm.

So do you still remember those days? I know you are a busy professor of literature in a college there in London and had no time to reminiscence. If you come to think of it, are you not astonished that the 5 of us boys became scholars who specialized in subjects related to literature. Or maybe not surprised, for after all, we are the "literary maniacs" of the town. Our book club, however, did not remain as an all boys club for subsequently, 3 girls joined us in our literary madness. Thanks to your bright idea to change our book club's name from The Knights of Don Quixote for you had noticed (but I think all the 5 of us noticed) that no girls want to join our book club though we had informed our classmates about the existence of it. You had been put into an "existential" crisis (just joking) because of this and suggested to us that we alter the name our book club to The Knights of Don Quixote and The Ladies of Dulcinea. Somehow, your suggestion was effective in enticing 3 enchanting ladies to join with us: "the knights." Athena, Belinda, and Yolanda started to ask us about how to be included as members of the book club. All of them are in Spain today. Athena is now a novelist and I think you know this for she is a widely translated novelist who is famous not only in Spain but around the world. Belinda is now a professor of literature in university in Madrid and a literary critic who specialized in the works of 18th century Spanish authors and she publishes articles in a literary journal from time to time. Though Yolanda is now a housewife, she still remains a "literary maniac" and a great reader of literature. She frequently emails me to ask questions about Miguel de Cervantes and sometimes to debate me about some trendy literary topics. What I mean by "trendy" is what Belinda wrote during a period of time. Her articles are sources of trendy literary topics here in Spain. Now, I am puzzled, why did I, who promoted reading Shakespeare's works in our book club, become the Cervantes scholar while you, who promoted the reading of Cervantes' works, became the Shakespeare scholar?

Now, back to our main topic: the upcoming literary conference in Vízcar would be held nine months from now so you will have time to prepare. The conference is about the newly discovered novel that was written by a friend of Don Jose Manuel Moscoso y Peralta who served as the Archbishop of Granada from 1789 to 1811. The Archbishop is an enthusiastic reader of Don Quixote and may even have a scholar's interest in the novel. The name of his friend is Jose Gonzalez Joaquin. It seemed that he wrote the novel while living in the palace and after finishing it, he dedicated it and gave it to his host. For some unknown reasons, it was not published

and was hidden in a secret cabinet. A well-known publishing company is very interested in the novel and decided to publish it. The company is one of the sponsor of the upcoming conference. Because the novel is connected to Don Quixote's beloved Dulcinea, it will be interesting to the former members of our book club. In fact, I had invited the 10 of us in the conference. Now, you may ask why I mentioned "10 of us" and not "8 of us," the reasons are these: 1) Athena's husband is included in the conference for he is a dramatist who adapted Don Quixote into a play. 2) Reynaldo's wife is a poetess and I think she can richly contribute to the conference and this judgement is based on my reading of her works. Our meeting in Víznaar will not be only a reunion of the members of The Knights of Don Quixote and The Ladies of Dulcinea but an induction of a dramatic knight and a lady of poetry into our soon-to-be-revived book club. Yes, the conference is both a reunion and a revival. Because of the internet, you can still be an active member in spite of being in London.

The topic you may discuss in the conference is, of course, related to your specialty. It is for you to choose what specifically your topic will be but it should be about the connections between Cervantes and Shakespeare. We can discuss further in the future but for now I will give you a hint why Shakespeare is a subject to be discussed with Cervantes and Madriaga's novel. One of the character in the novel is a Shakespearean actor who served as an actor in some of Shakespeare's plays while the dramatist was still alive. He went to Spain to "retire" after years of acting in England. Yes, this is why I need to give you a pdf or an epub of the manuscript as soon as possible but I still need to know if you can join the conference as a contributor before I can give you a digital copy of the soon-to-be-published manuscript.

Pedro, I apologize for this long email. But this is a very exciting project. I cannot help but be a vocal volcano of words. I hope you understand; and indeed, I am confident that you understand my enthusiasm for I based this judgment on our "literary maniac" days when we were in our hometown. Though people changes during the passage of time, I believe that you are still the same Pedro who raised the novel Don Quixote under the large V in the sky. You are still the literary knight who is not afraid to joust with other literary knights. Or maybe, the V is a metaphor of us joining together as in the Voltes V's "Let's bolt in" as a group in slaying the giant monster of literary ignorance who is tyrannizing the masses. Let us once again

promote Don Quixote and the joy of literary knowledge through book clubs. The "new-old" novel can serve as a spark for these renewed ventures into a new world of literary wonders.